

## Moral Education beyond the Secular and Sacred Dichotomy

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### Abstract

This paper addresses the current debate in public higher education regarding the proper goals of ethical education. On one side are those who espouse the classical aim of moral character formation, and on the other, those who emphasize the liberal aim of self-determination and autonomy. The paper attempts to analyze this debate in light of the context of Christian moral education and puts forth the argument that moral formation can only be rightly addressed by reintroducing theology as a discipline within the secular academy in a manner that forces us to rethink the place of religion in the public sphere and the relation between moral education in the private academy and the public one. In so doing, the secular and sacred dichotomy is transcended, if not entirely dissolved.

### Introduction

[1] A few years ago, I had the opportunity to “talk shop” with a fellow professor of philosophy from a large state university. I was teaching an introductory philosophy course for the first time, and I asked him how he structured his own introductory course, for he had taught such a course many times. My conversation partner answered that his entire course was centered on the goal of helping his students learn critical thinking skills through an examination of a serious ethical issue. Indeed, his entire course was devoted to exploring President Harry Truman’s decision to use atomic weapons against Japan in World War II. Students were provided with relevant information that President Truman would have had available at the time, and they, in assigned groups, were to research the topic, reflect critically upon it, and later argue for or against the dropping of an atomic bomb on Japan.

[2] I found this approach interesting, for while such case studies in ethics are common, I had never heard of structuring an introductory course in philosophy around a single ethical

decision. I felt compelled to ask a question: “How would you address a Mennonite student who took your course – for such a student, this dilemma might not be a dilemma at all?” My colleague seemed initially perplexed, and then a bit agitated. For him, the decision was a live option that had to be seriously considered by any rational person who had been in Truman’s shoes. We talked a bit more, but we made little progress toward resolving the question.

[3] Now the matter of disagreement with my colleague was not over whether such a monumental decision was important, nor whether ethical decision-making is a part of the moral life. Instead, where I seem to have parted company with him is over whether we can approach such questions cold, as it were. I argued that we cannot. We never approach an ethical dilemma in absolute freedom. We approach the dilemma, and indeed only recognize it as a dilemma, because of the convictions that we already possess. Moreover, these convictions not only shape the choices that we make, but even prescribe what options are available to us, even while they proscribe other options from even being considered as possibilities (on the role of convictions, see McClendon and Smith). Therefore, a Mennonite committed to pacifism simply may not consider Truman’s choice a real choice at all. My colleague would no doubt be wary of this assertion regarding our convictions and the strong role I have assigned them. “How can we critically examine our own convictions if they entirely make up our character and cannot be set aside?” he might ask. “Does this not make us a captive to the convictions of our families and other convictional communities in which we participate?” These are without doubt valid and important questions, and to these I now turn.

### Rival Views of Moral Education

[4] I think that this discussion with my colleague is an apt illustration of the current debate in ethical theory today between two broad and competing camps in public higher education, and it is *public* education that I want to address first. One camp is dedicated to the task of moral character formation, while the other emphasizes moral self-determination, autonomy, and decision-making. The first is dedicated to the perfectionist aim of moral education, while the second is dedicated to the liberal aim (see Rorty). Of course, each of these two camps can be broken into numerous other constitutive groups, and other camps besides these two exist. But for our purposes, we can consider the conflict between these two camps as representing a primary and central debate in moral education.

[5] Proponents of character formation and of the perfectionist aim in moral education are most often aligned with virtue ethics in the Aristotelian tradition. They argue that moral education is not primarily concerned with debating complex moral dilemmas, but with the formation of character through the instilling of specific virtues by activity, habit, and practices, and also, often times, through an examination of classic texts. They frequently charge proponents of a “moral dilemmas” approach with treating life as a series of discrete moral decisions, ignoring the fact that only a person of character can rightly understand and mediate such decisions, and that a focus upon ethical deliberation to the exclusion of questions of character leads to an insipid *relativism* in which every choice is up for grabs, as it were.

[6] Proponents of ethical reasoning and the liberal aim, in contrast, often see proponents of character formation as failing to appreciate the need to produce persons who not only possess convictions, but who can critically evaluate them and soundly decide between competing moral choices and justly adjudicate between various voices arising from differing communities. Moreover, they argue that proponents of character formation disagree among themselves both as to what virtues are normative and should be instilled, as well as how such virtues are to be defined. For example, while courage may be seen as a virtue, it is common to disagree as to what indeed constitutes a “courageous” act. For proponents of moral reasoning, moral formation of character is oftentimes but a thinly-veiled attempt at *indoctrination* in which compliance and conformity, rather than critical judgment, is valued. Proponents of the liberal aim thus stand not in the tradition of Aristotle, but of thinkers such as Kant and John Rawls.

[7] In contemporary public higher education, moral education itself is thus torn between two competing, and apparently conflicting, aims: 1) the perfectionist aim of producing persons of moral character and virtue, most often seen in neo-classical and communitarian approaches, and 2) the liberal aim of producing self-determining agents capable of critically examining and adjudicating between competing moral viewpoints and resolving ethical dilemmas. The question that remains is whether these two viewpoints can be harmonized or reconciled, or one shown to be superior to the other.

[8] We might begin to approach the question of how these two views relate to one another not by forcing either a false choice between them, nor by formulating a false hybrid of the two that ignores their distinctive aims, but, as Amelie Rorty states, by recognizing the necessity of both of these aims for moral education. We thus might designate the problem in Aristotelian fashion as one of finding a mean between two extremes, these extremes being on the one hand *relativism devoid of character*, and on the other, *indoctrination devoid of judgment*. This approach allows us to begin to formulate not a hybrid *theory* that would ignore the distinctive aims of each approach and reintroduce the problems each was formulated to resolve, but a *practice* which recognizes not only that both approaches are needed, but that both are indeed already present in current educational undertakings. And it is this move from a search for a *theory* of moral education to that of a *practice* that is central, for a theory too often implies a final solution to a question, and indeed the end of a conversation, whereas a practice implies that all moral investigation and education is ongoing and always open to further discussion. Such a practice recognizes both the need for a training in character and the instilling of virtues, but also the need for moral reflection and reasoning and the charitable and just regulation of engagement between competing viewpoints both in society and in institutions of higher learning themselves (see Bender).

[9] So any approach to moral education must both provide a way to answer the question of who we are to be and how our character is to be formed, as well as provide the means whereby such questions can be critically investigated and re-framed. But how can we begin this process if no agreement can be reached as to what virtues are central to such an education? It might be helpful to begin not by focusing upon abstract virtues, but by looking to persons who are recognized as moral exemplars across various racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural lines. For while agreement upon a theory of virtues, or even a standard list of virtues, may be elusive, a pragmatic and open-ended agreement may be possible regarding

moral exemplars who are admired both within and beyond the confines of distinctive traditions and across various communities. Such persons are marked by exemplary character and actions and may provide a place for moral discussion to begin.

[10] This approach allows for a modest response to those who argue that no definition of a virtuous action will satisfy all. In theory, such an answer may be correct, but in practice many persons from various traditions seem to agree that the courage of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mohandas Gandhi, as well as the kindness and self-sacrifice of Mother Teresa, can communicate across various cultural, religious, and racial/ethnic boundaries. Exemplars such as these therefore offer a way forward in discussing moral virtue and character and how we might live lives of character ourselves. They also provide a way to examine how moral reflection can be done by providing a pattern and precedent for how it has been done in the past. Therefore, to undertake moral education, it is perhaps appropriate and helpful to begin with a conversation regarding moral exemplars, rather than with a set list of virtues, for the latter approach makes the virtues appear to be abstract concepts that lack clear definition, rather than the embodied character traits that are best understood as they are concretely demonstrated and lived in the lives of particular individuals and communities.

[11] Now if the first move in moral education is one from *theory* to *practice*, the second is from the search for a *uniform consensus* to that of a *limited pragmatic agreement* that recognizes that the reason moral exemplars and their virtues are embraced will differ between persons and groups of persons. For example, one person may believe that the practice of honesty is commanded by God, while another might consider honesty as central to a humanist ethic. Nevertheless, both persons agree that telling the truth is central to living a moral life and may also agree that such truth-telling is necessary for any realization of human flourishing. Yet, here too, descriptions of what constitutes human flourishing vary, and such variation implies that this question itself must become part of the conversation, for differing construals of human happiness and flourishing themselves reciprocally effect the understanding of the virtues. There are no shortcuts in this process.

[12] No doubt the pragmatic and political consensus on moral formation here described might seem inadequate, or even offensive, both to those who argue for an objective rational ethic requiring universal consensus, as well as for those who contend that the virtues are only defined within an all-embracing world-view or narrative. This is a serious criticism. In response, we might remember that an answer has already been given to it, if only in a minimal and provisional fashion, when I noted that certain moral exemplars can be recognized across rival traditions, even if the virtues they exhibit are acknowledged for different reasons, and indeed, even if the precise definitions of the virtues are themselves matters of dispute. That the identity and nature of such virtues are not settled but themselves matters of contention does not undercut the current argument, for two reasons. First, all significant principles are disputed, and not only between, but also within, traditions. Second, the various accounts of virtues oftentimes can be placed into conversation with one another. While we may have to differentiate courage as defined by Aristotle from that defined by Aquinas, for example, we are still speaking of some reflections of similarity that make a

common appellation possible – both are called courage, and they can be compared.<sup>1</sup> We are not speaking of univocal terms, certainly, but we are not speaking of equivocal ones either. We are in fact speaking of analogies, however disputed. Nevertheless, it must be conceded that without an investigation of the deep theological and ethical convictions of the moral exemplars considered, the moral agreement we may attain regarding such virtues might remain at a quite superficial level.

[13] Therefore, it is important to recognize that the position here presented is only set forth to begin a conversation, not as a final vision for moral education. The minimal and pragmatic consensus here described simply provides a basis for establishing parameters for civil interaction and a program for furthering public moral education. It does not exclude but indeed calls for thicker moral descriptions provided by religious communities. Nonetheless, regardless of its deficiencies, we disparage such a pragmatic consensus and agreed-upon civic protocols at our peril. Such a limited consensus can be criticized as inadequate, but such a consensus, both as a basis for university discourse and society at large, should not be trivialized but treasured, for, as Jeffrey Stout has noted, this consensus makes peaceful co-existence amidst fundamental disagreement possible (212-14).<sup>2</sup> To put it crassly, it certainly beats warring tribalism, a reality all too evident in many parts of the world. And let us be frank: if the differing constitutive communities of society cannot agree upon the preferability of such peaceful co-existence to warring tribalism and genocide, we are on the road to a politics of Hobbesian war. A commitment to procedural rules for civic interaction is necessary for any sustainable society, no matter how diverse, no matter how much we might debate the essence of human flourishing and the nature of the good – indeed, the debate is only possible with such protocols in place. For this reason, a debate about unifying civil convictions among the diverse peoples and communities that abide within the boundaries of the current American nation state is inescapable and one of the greatest challenges of today.

[14] Lest we think that the pragmatic consensus here proposed could only be based upon liberal convictions, we do well to remember that it can also be embraced for fundamentally theological ones. As Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder has written: “A soft pluralism, when consistent, provides the most livable cultural space for Jews and Anabaptists, as well as for Jehovah’s Witnesses and followers of Rev. Moon. As a *civil* arrangement, pluralism is better than any of the hitherto known alternatives” (1996: 135 n.

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<sup>1</sup> For Aristotle, courage is preeminently displayed by the soldier who dies in battle, whereas for Aquinas, the preeminent example of courage is the martyr who dies for faith. For a comparison of Aristotle and Aquinas on courage, see Hauerwas and Pinches: 149-65. In philosophical terms, I am arguing that should agreement be reached upon denotation, some limited agreement on connotation (even if only implicit and minimal) is already implied. The opposite is of course also true. Failure to reach agreement upon denotation entails that agreement upon connotation is quite difficult if not impossible. Therefore, the tragic reality that one must face is that if no agreement can be reached upon denotation, fruitful discussion is extremely problematic. To put this in the starkest terms: between those who consider the actions of the 9/11 hijackers the epitome of courage, and those who see such actions not as in any way virtuous but the epitome of vice, there exists a wide and ugly ditch that far outdoes that of Lessing.

<sup>2</sup> Hauerwas and Pinches have also noted that the liberal unease with virtue ethics itself springs from a credible concern that “a return to the (essentially Greek) virtues implies as well a return to a certain politics of war” between competing definitions of the good (66).

23). This civil pluralism has been defended from a Christian theological standpoint by Yoder and other Protestant thinkers, and (along with the theme of the dignity of all human persons and communities) runs as an implicit thread throughout the social teaching of the Catholic church of the last century, preeminently displayed in the 1963 encyclical letter *Pacem in Terris*. Nicholas Rescher, who argues that an open pluralism, not a uniform consensus, should be the goal of civil arrangements, has also defended such pluralism from a philosophical standpoint. Such pluralism can and should reject both an indifferent relativism, in which every position is uncritically esteemed as equal to every other, and a dogmatic absolutism, in which nothing less than universal agreement on every question is acceptable. Any viable pluralism to be self-sustaining will without question have to enforce some forms of exclusion: not every form of free expression can be tolerated, such as violent racial crimes of hate (as but one example). Pure neutrality, the handmaiden of indifferent relativism, is simply not a viable option for any civil arrangement. Yet such pluralism must also provide for an optimal amount of convictional and associational freedom, rejecting a dogmatic forced consensus, in which nothing less than universal agreement on every question is acceptable. Such civic pluralism that undergirds the exercise of religious freedom has in time been articulated and defended by Christians across diverse theological traditions, from *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience* of Roger Williams to the *Declaration on Religious Liberty* of the Second Vatican Council.

### Challenging the Secular – Sacred Dichotomy

[15] Introducing a *theological* justification for pluralism at this point in a discussion of *public* education may seem surprising to some. Yet it is precisely this surprise that is problematic, not the introduction. For if, as argued above, all moral reasoning is shaped by moral convictions and indeed convictional communities, then it becomes clear that modern public education is not too pluralistic, but not pluralistic enough. For, remembering my opening story, it is precisely the Mennonite student's position that is summarily excluded in a discussion of Truman's decision, and it is too often the case that openly theological commitments are ruled out of the conversation of public education (and other forms of civil discourse) almost by default. And this is indeed strange, for widely admired moral exemplars are themselves shaped by particular convictions, and these are, either generally or specifically, theological ones.

[16] It is, in fact, one of the curious realities of our age that King, Gandhi, and Mother Teresa can be esteemed as moral heroes while the very theological convictions that, by their own admission, allowed them to do what they did, and lead the lives that they led, are ignored. Certainly, as stated above, such persons are admired across various communities and traditions. Yet, if such admiration is not to remain at the level of the superficial, and if the public university is to be a place where moral formation is taken seriously and as a training ground for civic interaction in other areas, then it will have to take the convictions that shape and mold moral exemplars with the same seriousness. If this is true, then a way to talk about religion in the university must be found where theological convictions are seriously considered and not simply marginalized as the strange beliefs of a few. Moral education is impoverished when torn from the very convictions that make ethics matter, and these convictions are more often than not theological ones. To separate moral exemplars

from the convictions that shape their identity and actions in the end renders their lives unintelligible and makes them appear as curious anomalies from whom we can learn little or nothing. So while moral exemplars can be recognized across traditions, they can only be truly understood when seen in the light of their own convictions and within their own traditions and contexts, and it is precisely these traditions and contexts that provide live options for moral formation and direction.

[17] Some might object and state that such theological and religious convictions are a matter of the private and not the public sphere, that they pertain to the sacred, not the secular. They may also contend that I have failed clearly to differentiate theological convictions from moral and ethical ones. Yet it is precisely such sharp and clean dichotomies (between private and public, between sacred and secular, between theological and ethical) that I argue must be rejected. Distinctions between them may and should at times be made, but not dichotomies.<sup>3</sup> This claim becomes obvious when we ask, “How might we ‘divide up’ and separate King’s theological and moral convictions? Or Gandhi’s? Or Mother Theresa’s?” Such a division works in principle; it does not work in the actual lives of people, as honest reflection and open examination reveals.

[18] Furthermore, the public sphere, like the secular, is not a place where theological and religious convictions play no role. It is, rather, the place where competing convictions (both moral and theological) come into contact with one another. Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, and secular humanists all find themselves under common local and national (secular) governments. The secular is simply the space where the engagements of these communities and their convictions are played out; it is not a place where no convictions come into play. Indeed, if who we are is defined by our convictions, then it is not even clear what such a view of the secular and public could mean.<sup>4</sup> So public education, like all avenues of public space, requires us to re-think how religion can be addressed in this space. And this leads to a further ethical conundrum.

[19] The breach between communitarian and liberal approaches in ethics is paralleled in the division between seeing moral education as primarily concerned with expounding the convictions and forming the character of a specific faith community, and moral education that serves a society comprised of numerous religious communities. Here too the question may rightly be raised as to whether any way may be found between this deep division between religious and secular ethics that neither sacrifices the integrity of the former or the aspirations of the latter. In essence, can public institutions of learning address theological and religious convictions in a way that neither outright excludes nor trivializes them?

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<sup>3</sup> I am not arguing that *distinctions* between these cannot be made, but that absolute *dichotomies* cannot be and do not in fact exist. For a related argument to which I am indebted, see Putnam, chapters one and two.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Perry has stated that this “setting aside” of religious convictions as a prerequisite for engagement in the public sphere is entirely problematic for the citizen: “To bracket them would be to bracket – indeed, to annihilate – herself. And doing that would preclude *her* – the *particular* person *she* is – from engaging in moral discourse with other members of society” (quoted in Carter: 56; Carter’s own work is noteworthy for making a similar claim).

[20] I believe that this may be possible if three presuppositions are accepted and held in view (I can only sketch these in brief fashion). First, moral education in the public university must be willing to explore theological convictions in a way that respects their irreducible character. Theological convictions embodied in a particular tradition that shapes and guides human action cannot be seen as mere illustrations of a more fundamental meta-ethics. Such convictions and the tradition that carries them must be seen as providing a distinctive and alternative vision for life that cannot be simply taken up into a more general ethics. In view of this, we must be open to the possibility that some moral systems are intractably at odds and cannot be reconciled – perhaps not only in time but in principle. This need not mean that such traditions cannot be placed in dialogue with one another, but it does mean that we must be open to an extended conflict of traditions that eschews cheap harmonization and the trivialization of real differences.

[21] Second, if the ethics of particular religious communities are not to be treated as illustrations of a more fundamental universal ethic but as distinct ethical visions, this requires that discussions between them not be reductionistic, but necessarily *ad hoc* and ongoing. If no foundational meta-ethic can be presupposed to undergird competing ethical visions, then agreement between such visions cannot be taken for granted but must be sought where it truly can be found. It is something that can only be seen *a posteriori*, not *a priori*. We must take agreement where we can find it, and we may find it in surprising places.

[22] Finally, public higher education must provide a place for this examination of convictions, and this entails that theology, taken in the broad sense as a “science of convictions,” in James McClendon’s words, once again takes its place within the university curriculum. Such a definition need not and should not trump the particularity of Christian theology and its own distinct understanding of reflection upon God’s revelation. It is not searching for a meta-theology of all, and therefore no, particular tradition. But such a department, where Christian theology, Jewish theology, Muslim theology, *et al.* are studied as live options in a non-reductive manner (and not simply as sociological or cultural by-products), and where they are taught by proponents of each tradition, would make the universities more rich and true to their original intent. Indeed, by excluding theology from the curriculum, public universities have become *more*, rather than *less*, parochial. For if moral education is to be adequately addressed, and if moral exemplars are to be truly understood, theological convictions must be taken into account and given their due place. Theological convictions that shape moral lives should not be seen as in need of special pleading, but as intrinsic to ethics itself and providing coherence to our lives. They are not embarrassments but the very things that make our lives intelligible. For moral formation truly to take up its difficult task, it can satisfy itself with neither the examination of dilemmas nor the examination of “great books,” though these have their rightful place. It must begin with the painstaking but necessary task of an examination of competing convictions exemplified in remarkable persons of character and embodied in particular convictional communities and traditions extended through time.

[23] Such a view of theology will perhaps satisfy neither the theological or political left nor right. In this scheme, no convictional community need be given priority within the public university (and, in light of the first amendment of the Constitution, none can be). Yet, these convictional communities should be set in dialogue and indeed polemical discussion; they



need not be viewed as equal alternatives by their proponents. Such a view does not exclude religion from the classroom; it simply ensures that all voices are heard. It requires that people not only speak *about* religion, as religious studies departments are often prone to do, but that people speak *for* the religious traditions as active participants in them and proponents for them (see Wilken: 1-23). Religious and moral convictions as embodied in particular communities and traditions are therefore seen not as lifeless belief systems but as live options that require rational debate and polemical exchange.

[24] But does “opening the doors” of the public university entail, then, a pure type of relativism and the entrance of any type of moral and theological discourse? No, not at all. First, because such convictional departments should represent major traditions, and not simply esoteric newcomers. Second, and more importantly, the interplay between rival convictional communities may well lead to recognition of the inadequacies of various positions, including one’s own. As Alasdair MacIntyre has argued, in such a university every professor (and, we might add, every student) plays a dual role: both as a protagonist for a particular moral/theological point of view, and as a contender with other viewpoints, critiquing both these other viewpoints and one’s own tradition in light of these others (230-32). It cannot be asserted too strongly: such pluralism is *not* relativism. Nor is it an insipid multiculturalism that claims equal validity for all points of view. It does *not* require that all positions be accepted by each participant as equally valid (remembering that we are, after all, *protagonists* and *contenders*). It only requires two things: first, that one willingly enter into extended conversation and debate that may end up challenging not only the positions of others, but one’s own; and second, a shared commitment to minimal and necessary judicial protocols to regulate disagreement, such as pragmatically-defined rules of justice and fairness.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, in the end, any valid tradition to be worth its salt will have to be able to critique *itself* and stave off its own indoctrination and calcification into narrow fundamentalisms.

[25] What is therefore in view in this paper is a re-thinking of how religion and theology are to be included in the university. But which university should we have in mind – the public or the private? Here two answers have been given (see Marsden: 37-41). Some have called for an inclusion of theology as a department in the public university, and for this department to include representatives of specifically *Christian* theology. I have attempted to spell this

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<sup>5</sup> Such procedural presuppositions must be in place and accepted by all participants to allow such a conversation to exist. From one perspective, they may be purely formal and do not imply an overarching meta-tradition. They simply ensure that all voices are heard and that conflict not be resolved by violence – a so-called minimalist commitment. Yet for such presuppositions themselves to be sustained and effective over time, they may well require grounding in deeply-entrenched civic convictions undergirded by an agreed-upon tradition. So, for example, some would argue that there can be no pure neutrality when it comes to the convictions needed to sustain a pluralist democracy itself; such a democracy can only be sustained by a particular set of convictions arising from and grounded in a coherent tradition. This argument has much to commend it, though such a contentious issue goes far beyond what can here be addressed. For one such argument for a theological, rather than secular, grounding for civic pluralism, see Chaplin. Whether such formal rules can find cross-communal agreement and dedication is of course one of the greatest challenges of our time. Nevertheless, the position here outlined is not predicated upon nor does it make appeals to a relativism of tolerance that in the end itself becomes but a new dogma of indoctrination.

answer out in a minimal fashion and provide a sketch of what it might look like above (for a related proposal to which I am indebted, see McClendon: 387-420).

[26] The other answer (which need not exclude the former but may complement it) is to start or strengthen universities, Christian or otherwise, where specific convictional communities and traditions can provide a coherent theological and moral vision. This seems to be the answer given by Alasdair MacIntyre and the inherent presupposition of various Catholic and Protestant universities and colleges that consciously espouse and confess their ecclesial traditions. MacIntyre argues that universities should be places not of *enforced constrained agreements* (as the pre-liberal universities were, where one over-arching moral vision was stringently enforced, and to where some public universities seem to be returning and some private ones have seemingly never left). Nor should they be places of *unconstrained agreements* (as liberal universities aspired and yet failed to be, thus failing to provide any adequate basis for a coherent moral vision). Rather, truly post-liberal universities should be places of *constrained disagreement* where students are initiated into conflict. Nevertheless, MacIntyre thinks it inevitable that what in fact will happen, and perhaps should happen, is that universities committed to rival traditions will spring up and take up their own tasks (233-34). This point is argued even more forcefully by Stanley Hauerwas in his Gifford Lectures when he states: "Christians do not desire just a place at the 'table,' particularly a table that has been set by the modern university. Christians do not want a *place* at the table; they want both to build and set the table itself" (2001: 238-39 n. 77; see also Hauerwas 1988).

[27] I myself would contend that it is such private confessional universities that are currently best equipped to take up the serious question of moral education and formation because of the coherent theological and moral vision that they seek to guide them. This vision when rightly understood in turn allows them to be less, rather than more, insular than their public counterparts, though provincialism is a constant temptation for such universities. The *means* by which this moral education is to be undertaken is an open question, but schools of this nature at least agree that such an enterprise is a necessary one, and that the pursuit of knowledge and the formation of character are, as the classical and the Christian traditions both recognize, intrinsically woven together. Nevertheless, while this second answer is most promising, the public university (or multiversity) itself should not be left abandoned to its current moral confusion.

### Conclusion

[28] To argue for revitalizing moral education in the public university might appear as strange talk to those who unabashedly hold to the particularity of the Christian faith, to the specificity of the Christian theological task, and to the uniqueness and singularity of the Christian moral vision (as I myself do). Against the approach here defined, Christians of various traditions might ask: What about the ethics of the church? Why be concerned with moral formation in the public university at all? Is not this best left to Christian universities? Or, in more general terms, why concern oneself with righteousness outside of the Christian community? Does this not always lead to a subjugation of the Gospel to a more fundamental ethic, making Christian ethics simply a sub-category of a larger moral framework? Worse yet,

does this not entail that the church in the end only serves the instrumental purpose of preserving and upholding the state, thus capitulating to accommodationism?

[29] While these are valid and important questions, they do not undermine the previous argument. The Christian need not sacrifice rich and irreducible theological commitments of Gospel and church to liberal and secular ones in taking up such a task as outlined above. Indeed, the concern of the Christian community for its surrounding culture (including the public university as an institution) does not betray, but helps fulfill, its own vision and call of witness by paying heed to Jeremiah's words to his exiled friends to "seek the welfare of the city where [God] has sent you into exile" (Jeremiah 29:7).<sup>6</sup> Christians indeed are citizens of a realm that entails that no temporal home be considered ultimate, and neither the public university nor the secular state is the Kingdom of God. But is it so hard to imagine that were Jeremiah here today, he might ask us to seek the welfare and peace of the university as well as that of the city in which we find ourselves? It is a question worth pondering.

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<sup>6</sup> This larger concern can be readily witnessed in the social teaching of the Catholic church: "The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community of people united in Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit in their pilgrimage towards the Father's kingdom, bearers of a message of salvation for all of humanity. That is why they cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history" (*Guadium et Spes – Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* 1965, Preface Part One). It may also be seen throughout the Protestant tradition and in thinkers often thought of as sectarian (and wrongly so), such as John Howard Yoder, who though committed to the particularity of the Christian story and to the task of Christian ethics as serving Christian life, nevertheless saw a place for care and concern for the society in which Christians find themselves not only as citizens but exiles (see Yoder 1997). In a similar vein, the twentieth century Reformed theologian Karl Barth refused to acknowledge any Lord but Christ, yet he too could find parables of the kingdom in the world, not because of an underlying moral structure independent of the Gospel, but because Christ himself is Lord of all the earth. And if Yoder and Barth help us understand something, it is that fundamental dichotomies between the private and the public, as well as that between the sacred and the secular, are entirely problematic. In closing, perhaps if there are to be any procedural rules at all in moral conversation, we should begin with two: we will not persecute those with whom we disagree, and we will not dismiss the arguments of others by labeling such persons sectarians.

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